

In a few days time the Muslims of Guiana will be celebrating the Festival of Eid, and many non-Muslims who have not let "ethnic considerations" over-ride their sense of community will join, if not in the religious aspects of the celebration, at least in its more mundane forms. It won't be long too when the Hindus will be celebrating their great Festival of Phagwah, and inviting non-Hindus to share their rejoicing with them. And when Easter comes, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and those people who prefer to call themselves secularists, will join in the relaxation and fun offered by a long week-end associated originally with the rising to a new life. In fact, by an almost providential coincidence the Festivals of the three great religions in Guiana follow each other as if in close procession - almost as if time itself were reminding us that even without differences we have a common fate and even in the observance of those differences we should show a common respect.

For whatever the optimistic secularist may think to the contrary, the religions of the world, especially the Eastern Religions which Europeans of the 19th century thought would vanish at the touch of their professedly superior ways, these religions are showing a vitality and resilience which many people in the West cannot understand. And something of that resilience and vitality is spilling over into the situation here, where Muslims and Hindus (as well as Christians) are taking a renewed interest in the deeper concepts, both poetic and philosophic, behind the outward and visible signs of their faiths.

The practice of those religions, and, more important, the search for their deeper meanings is bound to affect the development of Guianese culture. Behind some of our poetry and our paintings as well as our music, as they develop, will lie ideas and notions born in the Hindu faith or fashioned from the words of the Koran, as well as from the African and Western worlds. And to fully appreciate their significance, to get at their full meaning and beauty, it may well be necessary to go beyond a mere knowledge that Eid involves beautifully cooked Indian dishes and Phagwah the throwing of red water. In fact, one may on a purely social level say that ignorance of the other man's faith is one of the things that helps to maintain that atmosphere of intolerance which pervades the country today. And the place where one can begin to destroy this ignorance is the schools. In many schools where religion is taught at all it is taught with a desire to inculcate one religion.

There is nothing wrong with this is a school supported by some definite religious group. But even in schools with a definite religious allegiance as well as schools committed to no religion, I feel that one of the important subjects on the curriculum should be comparative religion. I'm not thinking solely of the habit of bringing in some exponent of each religion and letting him "spout" to the students. Invariably such ~~experts~~ people stress the virtues of their own faith and even when they do it with restraint, they still urge their own religion as the best. What we do need in our schools is teachers of comparative religion who can lead their pupils to the study of the world's great religions, with a certain detachment. You see, if comparative religion is taught in much the same way as History is taught, that is examining human societies in terms of what men in those societies believed and how it affected their actions, then you have a subject which can broaden the mind and lead to a certain maturity in dealing with other people's attitudes.

For a child as well as an adult the study of Islam in its heyday in the 9th and tenth century at least will show that all our technological *progress* is not due to Europe alone. Similarly, a study of the Hindu religion related to Indian society and culture will make both more understandable and set the British contribution to India's modern life in more modest perspective. It is for these reasons that one would like to see both the U.W.I. and the U.G. moving towards the establishment of faculties of comparative religion from which ~~from~~ teachers will come to lead their pupils in the way of intelligent appreciation of other religions, tolerance and sympathy for other people's attempts and answer the riddle of the Universe.
